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## Engaging Communities: planning for energy infrastructure

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Energy Ireland  
Croke Park, Dublin  
14<sup>th</sup> June 2017

# Engaging communities: planning for energy infrastructure

**Geraint Ellis**

School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University, Belfast

[g.ellis@qub.ac.uk](mailto:g.ellis@qub.ac.uk)



@gellis23

# Outline

- Rationales for community engagement
- A focus on the link with social acceptance
- Key principles, issues and design of community engagement
- The wider context for community engagement

# Rationales for community engagement

- There are a range of rationales for ensuring effective engagement in the planning and development of energy projects:
  - Alignment with ideas of democracy and inclusion ...
  - Legal requirements ...
  - A way of informing the public ...
  - Enhancing the understanding of problems and solutions...
  - Increase quality of policy and projects ...
  - Promotes 'energy citizenship' ...
  - It has a role in social acceptance of energy projects ...

# Energy Citizenship (White Paper, 2015)

‘From Passive Consumer to Active Citizen

*“The transition will see the energy system change from one that is almost exclusively Government and utility led, to one where citizens and communities will increasingly be participants in renewable energy generation, distribution and energy efficiency.*

*Improved community engagement will be essential to renewable energy policy making and implementation”.*

Energy White Paper  
DCNER (2015)



Roinn Cumarsáide,  
Fuinneoth & Acmhainní Nádurtha  
Department of Communications,  
Energy & Natural Resources

## Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future

2015-2030



Wind Energy in Ireland:  
Building Community Engagement  
and Social Support

No. 139 July 2014



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta  
National Economic & Social Council

**The Concept of  
Social Acceptance**  
(after Wustenhagen et al 2007)

## **Community acceptance**

Related to the acceptance of specific wind energy developments by host communities.

# **Social Acceptance of Wind Energy**

## **Socio-political acceptance**

Related to acceptance of wind technology as a viable energy source and supported in government policy and by the general public

## **Market acceptance**

Related to the acceptance of wind technology by investors, financial institutions and consumers of electricity

# Health and environmental impacts

Concerns over visual, bio-diversity, well-being impacts on local area etc.

Key drivers of  
community concern

## Community Acceptance of Wind Energy

### Fairness of consenting process

Lack of trust in developers, regulators and the transparency of the consenting regime

### Perceived distribution of costs & benefits

Fear that external companies accrue key benefits, while communities bear costs

# Community Engagement and Acceptance

- **Health and environmental impacts**
  - Understanding of local factors and improving project design and siting.
  - *i.e. meaningful access to decision-making.*
- **Perceived distribution of costs & benefits**
  - Improving local multipliers and links to the public interest.
  - *i.e. a sense of distributive justice*
- **Fairness of consenting process**
  - 'Fair process' effect.
  - Aim for 'settlement of differences' rather than strive for consensus.
  - *i.e. a sense of procedural justice.*



# Five 'Truths' of Community Acceptance

1. Local opposition is just one of several aspects of the planning "obstacle course" faced by developers;
2. Social acceptance is an issue everywhere;
3. Objection is not based on ignorance, but on values;
4. Objection may be a reaction to the perception of the developer, the decision-making process, the project, or all three;
5. Opposition and support can change over time.



# Eight principles for effective engagement for renewable projects

1. Don't think NIMBY;
2. Understand the dispute not just the objectors;
3. Think 'values' as much as 'facts';
4. Community acceptability will depend on fairness and trust;
5. Honesty and transparency should pay off;
6. The perception of community benefits will be contested;
7. See planning as a potential solution, not a 'problem'.
8. This stuff is not easy.







# Procedural Design for Community Engagement

- Remember the possibility of a 'fair process effect';
- The perception of fairness and previous experience of decision-making;
- Early deliberation rather than late information-giving;
- Wind development as part of a long-term and integrated vision of an area;
- Effective community engagement needs freedom of information, neutral facilitation and technical assistance;
- The need for neutral umpires and intermediaries?
- Good process can cost time and resources;
- Skills and knowledge of all involved.



# Wider contexts of Community Engagement

